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Leza L Olson 09/18/2006 09:01:23 AM From DB/Inbox: Leza L Olson

Cable  
Text:

C O N F I D E N T I A L                    TEL AVIV 03691

SIPDIS

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ACTION: POL  
INFO: IPSC PD IMO RES ECON DCM DAO AMB AID ADM RSO  
CONS

DISSEMINATION: POL

CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: DCM:GCRETZ

DRAFTED: ECON:BMASILKO

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6388

INFO RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 4536

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 003691

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/15/2016

TAGS: PREL KWBG LE IR SY IS

SUBJECT: (C) SNEH: SOLVE ISRAEL-PA CONFLICT BEFORE WAR WITH IRAN

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Gene A. Cretz for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In an August 24 meeting with Staffdel Talwar, MK Ephraim Sneh said that that Israel needs to settle the decades-long conflict with the Palestinians in the next two or three years. Sneh stated that after the conflict with Hezbollah the concept of unilateral disengagement from the Palestinians is "dead." He said Israel will need to seek negotiated solutions, beginning with an economic deal for Gaza. Sneh postulated that in the wake of such a settlement it will be possible to form a new regional alliance, with moderate Arab governments, against Iranian aggression. As part of this alliance, Sneh described a "small deal" which the west can extend to Syria to help counter growing Iranian influence. Sneh said that a commission of inquiry into the conduct of Israeli military operations during the recent hostilities would focus on why Israel was not prepared for the war, and why a decision to send in massive ground forces was delayed. End summary.

¶2. (C) Member of the Knesset Defense and Foreign Affairs Committee Ephraim Sneh said that as long as the regime in Tehran remains in power, there is no way to avoid a clash between Israel and Iran. He believes that Israel must prepare for the coming conflict with the understanding that it will have to rely solely on its own military for defense. Sneh said, however, that with limited funds and a "variety of methods" the U.S. could topple the regime in Tehran because "most Iranians might not like Israel, but they like American culture." Describing the coming conflict with Iran as "existential," Sneh claimed that Iran is recruiting Palestinians for Hezbollah activities in the West Bank and Gaza because "they are determined to foil any chance for peace."

¶3. (C) To enable Israel to focus on preparations for the

coming conflict with Iran, Sneh suggested forging a negotiated peace with Palestinians. Sneh claimed that after the conflict with Hizballah the concept of unilateral disengagement from the Palestinians is "dead." He cautioned that it might take Prime Minister Ehud Olmert time to see the truth in this statement, but that the GOI needs to open negotiations with the constitutionally-mandated negotiator for the Palestinians -- Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmud Abbas. Sneh said that Olmert's advisors have been portraying President Abbas as "moderate but weak" and Hamas as "militant and strong" because "if you have a strong, moderate you have to negotiate."

¶ 14. (C) Sneh proposed presenting a very simple choice to the Palestinian people and leadership: Iran or the west. If the Palestinians choose the west they can have a state with a viable economy and a decent standard of living. If they choose to ally themselves with Iran they can expect to live like the Lebanese in poor Hizballah-controlled villages. Sneh said that given these two choices he believes that the Palestinians will choose to ally with the west. He said forcing such a decision could help to pull the rug out from under Hamas's base of power. Sneh said that Hamas depends on a stalemate and no offer of negotiations from Israel to remain in power.

¶ 15. (C) As an initial step towards returning to negotiations with the PA, Sneh proposed convening an international conference on the Gaza economy. Comparing Gaza to a mosquito-filled marsh, Sneh outlined the choice for the GOI as either spraying pesticide (trying to prevent Hamas-sponsored attacks), or cleaning up the stagnant water (improving economic conditions). Sneh said he supports strengthening Abbas' position by allowing him to pay salaries to government employees. Sneh said the Middle East is not "sanitary," and Israel needs to be pragmatic, not moral, about Abbas's payments to civil servants who may be members of Hamas. If some of the recent salary payments accidentally crept into the hands of Hamas members, it is worth the leakage to procure the loyalty of 100,000 Fatah civil servants and strengthen Abbas. Sneh also emphasized the importance of strengthening the Palestinian Presidential Guard Force.

¶ 16. (C) In conjunction with a positive move towards settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Sneh outlined a "small deal" to bring Syria to the west and away from Iranian influence. Sneh presented this small deal as more realistic than the "big deal" that Syria is seeking -- the return of the Golan Heights. Sneh proposed that in return for a policy similar to the one that the U.S. adopted towards Libya, Syria should be expected to:

- seal the Syrian-Iraqi border and not allow the transit of insurgents,
- stop the supply of arms to Hizballah,
- stop providing sanctuary to Khaled Misha'al in Damascus;
- release captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, and
- cut off funding for militants in Gaza.

Sneh said that the U.S. would not need to promise American aid to Syria as part of the small deal. Simply an assurance that the U.S. would "start to treat them normally" should suffice. He described the small deal as Syria's chance to "leave the crazy club and join the sane club."

¶ 17. (C) Sneh predicted that moderate Arab states might join Israel and the west in an anti-Iranian coalition. Sneh said that the emotional pull of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the last major obstacle for moderate Arab states to overcome before forming a lasting alliance with Israel against Iran. By shifting the strategic balance in the Middle East, he said that Israel can fend off the coming conflict with a nuclear-armed Iran.

18. (C) Sneh said that he volunteered to return to military service during the recent Lebanon conflict and spent 11 nights on the western Israel-Lebanon border. He joked, "I'm not able to sleep without the sound of artillery fire." Sneh assessed Hizballah fighters as well trained, well equipped, and well prepared. Sneh said he expects a commission of inquiry on the war to examine Israel's preparedness for the war and why a decision to send in massive ground forces was delayed. He blamed former Finance Minister Binyamin Netanyahu for budget cuts that "crippled our military." Sneh said that the focus of questions on the conduct of the war will center on the lag-time between when the government understood that air power alone was not enough to stop rocket attacks, and the beginning of the ground invasion. Sneh described public opinion in Israel as bitter because Israelis believe that "if we do not win, that means that we lose."

19. (U) Staffdel Talwar did not have an opportunity to clear this message.

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